

San Francisco Contemporary Music Players

**Performers:**

Tod Brody, flute  
Carey Bell, clarinet (Campion)  
Peter Josheff, clarinet (Harbison)  
Hall Goff, trombone  
Julie Steinberg, piano (Harbison)  
Ann Yi, piano (Campion, Feldman)  
Jeffrey Sykes, piano (Wuorinen)  
Christopher Froh, percussion (Wuorinen)  
Daniel Kennedy, percussion (Campion, Harbison, Feldman)  
Roy Malan, violin  
Nanci Severance, viola  
Stephen Harrison, cello (Campion, Feldman)  
Leighton Fong, cello (Harbison)

Robert Shumaker, *Recording Engineer*  
Gregory Kuhn, *Sound Engineer*

*Tonight's performance of John Harbison's The Seven Ages is  
underwritten in part by Russ Irwin.*

*Tonight's concert is supported in part by:  
Wells Fargo Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts,  
Aaron Copland Fund for Music.*



**From the Top**

Monday, 5 October 2009, 8 pm  
Herbst Theatre  
Sara Jobin, Conductor

**Edmund Campion**, *600 Secondes dans le vieux modèle*  
(600 Seconds in the worn-out model) (2009)

U.S. Premiere  
(Approximate duration: 10 minutes)

**Morton Feldman**, *the viola in my life (1)* (1972)

(Approximate duration: 10 minutes)

Nanci Severance, viola

**Steve Reich**, *Vermont Counterpoint* (1982)

(Approximate duration: 10 minutes)

Tod Brody, flute

↻ *Intermission* ↻

**Charles Wuorinen**, *Trombone Trio* (1985)

(Approximate duration: 10 minutes)

**John Harbison** *The Seven Ages* (2008)

(Approximate duration: 25 minutes)

Pamela Dellal, soprano

- I. The Seven Ages
- II. The Balcony
- III. Decade
- IV. Aubade
- V. Summer Night
- VI. Fable

*Co-Commissioned by the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players  
and the New York New Music Ensemble.*

## Program Notes

### *Edmund Campion* [b. 1957]

Although Edmund Campion is known among his colleagues for his imaginative approach to music technology, when it comes to the listening experience technology per se must take a back seat. As he put it in an interview with fellow-composer Keeril Makan (*Computer Music Journal*, 2004): “Emerging technologies have been the generative source for most of my musical explorations.” Yet Campion continues, “There is nothing new here. For Chopin, it was the modern piano, and for Schaeffer, it was the tape recorder. Finally, there is no distinction between acoustic sound, natural sound, or electronic sound. Everything is integrated with the full spectrum of all possible sounds. Bach’s *Art of the Fugue* and the noise of Niagara Falls both have a place in my compositional thinking. The site of the concert hall has become exciting again, and writing for acoustic instruments alone is just another part of the work. I hope I am coming full circle, back to the essential musical material, to music that is made just for hearing.”

Campion’s broadly historical outlook is matched by the wide geographical scope of his early experiences. A native of Dallas, Texas, Edmund Campion did his doctoral work at Columbia University with Mario Davidovsky before attending the Paris Conservatory where he studied with composer Gérard Grisey. In the composer’s own words: “I have experience in three distinct musical practices: free improvisation (energy, impulse and the eternal present), the American/Columbia University academic avant-garde of the 1980s (structure, procedural rigor, modernist orthodoxy), and the studio of Gérard Grisey and IRCAM of the 1990s (sound, process, mysticism and science). In 1993 he was selected to work at the Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique [IRCAM] and the following year he produced *Losing Touch*, which has been performed twice by the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players. Like the percussion sextet *Ondoyant et divers* (featured by the Players in 2007), this earlier duet for tape and vibraphone crosses, in Campion’s words, “the fruits of improvisation and formalized composition,” yielding a kinetic texture of delicate and jazzy rhythmic patterns.

The success of *Losing Touch* brought Campion new IRCAM commissions including his first large-scale piece for live, interactive electronics, *Natural Selection* (premiered in 1996 with the composer at the MIDI grand-

piano keyboard), and the evening-long video and dance production *Playback* (1998-99), choreographed by François Raffinot. In addition, after his return from Paris, Campion joined the composition faculty at U. C. Berkeley, where he is also Co-Director of the Center for New Music and Audio Technologies (CNMAT). He has thus had ample opportunity to reflect on the uses and abuses of music technology. Campion observes: “Technology has unwittingly suppressed live music practice, one of its big downsides. Nevertheless, I think we are learning to better handle the fruits of our discoveries. The IRCAM/Boulez model of the grand concert with massive electro-acoustic forces has been replaced by portability, performability, and performer-sensitive work. The performers need reliable systems to rehearse, just as they do with the music of Brahms. They need to feel renewed by the difficult new instruments they are required to learn. All this helps define a new class of musical activity. That’s the positive side.” This side was on display in *Outside Music* (2005), co-commissioned and given its world premiere by the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players with Julie Steinberg at the helm of a new keyboard instrument designed to exhibit pianistic virtuosity and to generate a dazzling array of computer-based sounds, modified in immediate response to the performer’s touch.

Among Campion’s honors are the Rome Prize, the Nadia Boulanger Award, the Paul Fromm Award at Tanglewood, a Charles Ives Award given by the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and a Fulbright scholarship for study in France. In June 2001, the TEMPO Festival at U. C. Berkeley devoted an entire concert to his music, including *Sons et Lumières* for video, player piano, and eight channel tape. He has received commissions from IRCAM, the Centre National de Création Musicale, Radio France, the American Composers’ Orchestra, the Percussion de Strasbourg Ensemble, and the Center for New American Music, among others. In addition to *Losing Touch* and *Outside Music*, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players featured *Domus Aurea* (for vibraphone and piano) in 2001 and the piano duo *A Complete Wealth of Time* in 2005. The ensemble recently produced a CD of Campion’s works, *Outside Music*, for Albany Records.

### **Campion, *600 Secondes dans le vieux modèle* (600 Seconds in the worn-out model) (2009)**

*for flute/piccolo, clarinet, violin, cello, percussion, and piano*

Speaking of *600 Secondes dans le vieux modèle* (commissioned by Radio France and premiered by the Zellig Ensemble in 2009 at the Festival

Presence in Metz, France), the composer writes: “the *vieux modèle* is a reference to the various practices of post-war composers from Messiaen and Boulez to Xenakis and Stockhausen; the music from these composers is now old music... fashionably criticized for being inaccessible, incomprehensible, and often un-listenable. Some call the entire period of the avant-garde a grand mistake. No matter. This is the music of my youth. Its materials and techniques are ordinary and attractive to me.

“*600 Seconds in the worn-out model* is a compendium of strict techniques practiced by those avant-garde composers who attempted to restart music from scratch after the Second World War. Technically, the piece employs integral serialism (pitches, registers, and durations are wholly pre-determined in a large-scale pre-compositional plan), and mirror form (the entire second-half of the piece is a palindrome of the first half). This is not homage, but something concerned with ingestion, transformation and re-use. The techniques developed by the earlier composers were once bound to controversial aesthetic and philosophical foundations, but no more. Left to my generation are the practices and the continuing possibility to sort out, synthesize and where possible, discover new music.

“Beyond all the techniques, it is just my music. I hope it provides enjoyable listening, and then if one happens to be an aficionado of the last sixty years of weird music making, I hope it evokes stories about unlikely and improbable musical outcomes.... At the beginning of the work, the conductor starts a stopwatch and at the last note, he/she checks the time. If the total length exceeds 600 seconds the conductor announces the result to the audience. It’s a joke, yes, but it also keeps the ensemble focused on moving forward, not losing energy, and not worrying so much about the past.”

### ***Morton Feldman* [b. 1926-87]**

Writing in the early 1990s, Mark Swed, critic for the *Los Angeles Times* and expert on music of the later twentieth-century recalled composer Morton Feldman as a man of paradoxes: “He was a big, garrulous, friendly man with a raucous sense of humor. He had an inexhaustible supply of ideas and theories—some brilliantly illuminating, some hilariously off-the-wall—about music, about art, about philosophy, about life. He was an occasionally gruff and always overpowering presence who

spoke with a memorably thick New York accent. Yet he wrote a music of refined, exquisite, prismatic beauty unlike any other, a music of floating tone and mesmeric harmony and gorgeous sounds, surrounded by elegant, mysterious silences. He was a man often short of breath who wrote, in his later years, the longest-breathed phrases in all music, pieces that can go on, unbroken, for hours.”

Since its inception, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players has recorded or performed nearly a dozen of Feldman’s works, ranging from the early vocal solo *Only* (1946) to the chamber orchestra piece *For Samuel Beckett* (1987), written the very year of the composer’s death. Feldman’s *Bass Clarinet and Percussion* (1981), performed by the Players in 2008, represents not just the predilections of composer’s last decade but also the elegiac tone for which he was justly famous throughout his life. His most famous score, *The Rothko Chapel* (performed by the Players in 1986) was written in 1971 as a tribute to Max Rothko’s fourteen vast, almost monochrome canvases, commissioned by John and Dominique de Menil to grace an octagonal space that Feldman calls “a place for contemplation where men and women of all faiths, or of none, may meditate in silence, in solitude or celebration together.” A similar purpose shapes Feldman’s other commemorative pieces—*For Frank O’Hara*, *For Stefan Wolpe*, *Christian Wolff in Cambridge*, *DeKooning*—whose titles also reflect some of the most important influences on his life and work: American literature, compositional modernism, the musical experiments of the so-called “New York school” (John Cage, Christian Wolff, Earle Brown, David Tudor) and especially the art of the abstract expressionists.

For students of Feldman’s music, there are important distinctions to be made between the phases of his career. In the 1940s and early 1950s, with scores like *Projections* (1950-51), he concerned himself particularly with innovations in musical notation: graphic scores, boxes that suggest only the general register of musical events, and depictions of textural density, with or without the representation of specific pitches. After 1953, his musical experiments centered on the creative treatment of rhythm and time, leaving many decisions about duration (and therefore about coordination of musical events) up to the individual performers, but in the 1970s he began a gradual move away from improvisatory moments and toward more conventional notation. However distinct Feldman’s methods were at different periods of his life, listeners to a representative selection of his works are apt to discover more continuities

than disjunctions in his oeuvre, as musicologist Steven Johnson observes: “Throughout his career, [Feldman] adhered with remarkable consistency to a few tenets he learned from [New York’s abstract impressionist painters]: a dislike of intellectual system and compositional rhetoric; a hostility to past forms of expression; a preference for abstract gestures set in flat ‘all-over’ planes of time; an obsession with the physical materials of art; a belief in handmade methods; and a trust in instinct.”

Like Cage, Feldman calls attention to individual sounds—and to the silences that separate them. His works grow like crystals: modular, at first glance even random, yet often highly structured. In her writings on American experimental music, Elena Dubinets has observed that “The sounds in [Feldman’s] music should flow gently and be heard out to the end, without being interrupted by other sounds. His works are full of many singular ‘sound-lives’ which are intended to sound out until their complete decay.” But more than Cage, Feldman seems to have cultivated his garden of sounds to create an atmosphere that is distinctly devotional, perhaps even therapeutic in quality. As a result, even familiar sounds invite, or maybe require, a spirit of re-discovery. “All I ask,” Feldman once explained, “is that composers wash out their ears before they sit down to compose.”

### **Feldman, *the viola in my life* (1) (1972)**

*for solo viola, flute, percussion, piano, violin, and cello*

Though it was composers whom Feldman advised to wash out their ears, listeners can experience the same type of aural cleansing in Feldman’s sextet *the viola in my life* (1), not because of any rushing torrents of sound but, on the contrary, because each note or chord or motif, like a drop of water, contains its own microsystem of sound. Until the final few moments, where an element of repetition gradually insinuates itself into audibility, Feldman’s sound-islands float characteristically untethered to discernible melodic or harmonic schemes. What comes to the fore instead is tone color and, in a statuesque sort of way, the presence of the performers, whose tightly controlled movements turn a tapestry into a tableau vivant.

### ***Steve Reich* [b. 1936]**

“I am interested in perceptible processes. I want to be able to hear the process happening throughout the sounding music. To facilitate closely detailed listening a musical process should happen extremely gradually. Performing and listening to a gradual musical process resembles: pulling back a swing, releasing it, and observing it gradually come to rest; turning over an hour glass and watching the sand slowly run through to the bottom; placing your feet in the sand by the ocean’s edge and watching, feeling, and listening to the waves gradually bury them.” For students of new music, it can come as a shock to realize that these words, by composer Steve Reich, were written more than forty years ago. Although Reich has long since departed from the stricter type of so-called “process music” that he advocated in the 1960s, his scores still exhibit a fascination with patterning—sometimes hypnotic, sometimes fostering a heightened sensory awareness, an attention that is physical, even tactile, yet curiously detached from the ebb and flow of human emotion.

Many impulses coalesced in the creation of Reich’s process-oriented scores, chief among them: 1) a reaction against the intricate and largely inaudible processes of serial (twelve-tone) and “chance” (aleatory) composition, 2) new methods of combining sounds enabled by electronics, especially tape loops, and 3) the influence of African and other non-western musics that emphasize rhythmic patterning and interlocking textures. Like the other so-called “minimalist” composers (Terry Riley, Philip Glass, and sometimes John Adams), Reich favored discrete musical fragments—single melodic phrases, simple harmonies—as his compositional building blocks. Using tape loops of spoken text (*It’s Gonna Rain*, 1965; *Come Out*, 1966), he pioneered a technique of phased repetition whereby two identical recordings begin in unison but gradually move out of sync with one another. In 1967, Reich began to transfer this technique to live performance with his *Violin Phase* and *Piano Phase*, works that generate endless rhythmic variety from the overlapping of a single phrase of music and the sheer concentration required from the performer.

California can claim partial responsibility for Reich’s interest in African drumming, which was sparked in the early 1960s after he had arrived for graduate work at Mills College (with degrees in philosophy and composition from Cornell and Juilliard already in hand). While a student of Darius Milhaud and Luciano Berio, he attended a composers’ con-

ference at the Ojai Festival and encountered a book on the topic by A. M. Jones. In 1970-71, he spent five weeks at the University of Ghana in Accra, and upon his return to New York he composed his watershed ensemble score, *Drumming* (1971). From this point forward, Reich's compositional process has often relied on his own performing ensemble, which he called, in an interview with William Duckworth, "a laboratory for learning orchestration of the sort that I have become involved in." His later works, including *Music for Eighteen Musicians* (1974-76) and *Eight Lines* (1979) are as much about pushing the limits of performers' live interaction as they are about audibly unfolding processes.

As a touring musician based in New York (though he returned to the West Coast in 1973-74 to learn Indonesian gamelan music in Berkeley and Seattle), Reich dramatically broadened the scope and variety of the sounds that sparked his musical processes, shedding (at least in theory) the "minimalist" label. *Tehillim* (1981) is a welter of rhythmic and melodic canons that work in service of a jubilant, Hebrew psalm setting. The masterful odyssey *Different Trains* (1988) and the "documentary music theater work" *The Cave* (1993) deepen Reich's association with Judaica, and each work features what musicologist Paul Griffiths and others have called "speech melody," instrumental motives derived from the contours of recorded speech. In *Different Trains*, Reich juxtaposes spoken phrases from the railroad contexts of his own youth with material evocative of the trains that took European Jews to concentration camps during those same years. A darker vision of history also colors *The Cave* (about the burial place of the patriarch Abraham); the ecological fable *Desert Music* (1984), featuring the poetry of William Carlos Williams; and the multimedia theater piece *Hindenburg* (1997), which makes its own counterpoint of technological tragedies.

It may seem strange that a composer with such strong roots in new media would harbor such skepticism about the "progress" so often associated with the twentieth-century. But Reich himself has always been careful to hear his own "new" sounds in relation to tradition. He told William Duckworth in the mid-1990s: "wherever my musical intuition points, I try to follow it to its ultimate conclusion—and, at the same time, to search for whatever correspondences I could find to some point in musical history, Western or non-Western. When you find something new and you find out how it relates to earlier musical practice... that for me is a great confirmation that in fact you're on solid ground."

**Reich, *Vermont Counterpoint* (1982)**  
*for solo flute/piccolo/alto flute and tape*

The composer writes: "*Vermont Counterpoint* (1982) was commissioned by flutist Ransom Wilson and is dedicated to Betty Freeman. It is scored for three alto flutes, three flutes, three piccolos and one solo part all pre-recorded on tape, plus a live solo part. The live soloist plays alto flute, flute and piccolo and participates in the ongoing counterpoint as well as more extended melodies. The piece could be performed by eleven flutists but is intended primarily as a solo with tape. The duration is approximately ten minutes. In that comparatively short time four sections in four different keys, with the third in a slower tempo, are presented. The compositional techniques used are primarily building up canons between short repeating melodic patterns by substituting notes for rests and then playing melodies that result from their combination. These resulting melodies or melodic patterns then become the basis for the following section as the other surrounding parts in the contrapuntal web fade out. Though the techniques used include several that I discovered as early as 1967, the relatively fast rate of change (there are rarely more than three repeats of any bar), metric modulation into and out of a slower tempo, and relatively rapid changes of key may well create a more concentrated and concise impression."

**Charles Wuorinen [b. 1938]**

There is something Mozartean about Charles Wuorinen. It's not his style, of course, which has been more persuasively described as a fusion of the twentieth-century paths set out by Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Varèse. Nor is it an apparently easy relationship between composer and audience; Wuorinen's reputation tends instead toward the blunt and uncompromising—in the words of late Bay Area critic Michael Steinberg, "he is a man of strong opinions, strongly expressed." But throughout his burgeoning catalog of more than two hundred works one can find the absolute fluency, the idiomatic writing, the engaging musical surfaces, and above all the solidity of structure most often associated with a "classic" repertory.

Having made his first essays at composition at the tender age of five, Wuorinen was a prodigy of sorts, and he had decided upon a composing career by the time he was twelve. Although he had lessons with Otto

Luening, Jack Beeson, and Vladimir Ussachevsky while an undergraduate at Columbia University, he considers himself mostly self-taught. Steinberg recalls that even in Wuorinen's early years, "He never sounded like an imitator of Stravinsky or Varèse or anyone else." Like Aaron Copland more than three decades earlier, Wuorinen came to prominence with a magisterial set of Piano Variations (1963), bristling with rhythmically intricate outbursts. Already an accomplished pianist, he premiered the work at one of the first concerts of the pioneering Group for Contemporary Music, which he co-founded with composer Harvey Sollberger. The very next year, he was invited to join the faculty at Columbia, and the Group remained in residence there until 1971. (The Group is still active in New York City, and Wuorinen moved on to academic appointments at the Manhattan School of Music and Rutgers University.)

During the late 1960s, Wuorinen was best known for his innovative ideas about extending Schoenberg's serial system to musical parameters other than pitch—particularly for his ideas about deriving large-scale structural dimensions (such as the length of a composition's subsections) from the tone row itself. At the same time, he was exploring the continuum of tone colors and durations made available by electronic music in *Time's Encomium* (1970), for which he won a Pulitzer Prize. Though it remains one of only two electro-acoustic works by Wuorinen, its subtle distinctions in timbre and rhythm can also be heard in most of his works for traditional instruments, especially in the *Percussion Symphony* of 1976 and the *Percussion Quartet* (1994), performed by the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players in 2006.

The *Percussion Symphony* also exemplifies a preoccupation less frequently remarked upon in writings about the composer: his allusions to musical styles of the past. In this case, two free arrangements of Renaissance music (Guillaume Dufay's "Vergine Bella") serve as interludes between the work's three movements. Although these transcriptions offer an audibly "archaic" sound, many of Wuorinen's later works build more seamlessly on material from past sources. This is especially true of the works he wrote during his years in San Francisco. From 1985 until 1989, he directed the concert series New and Unusual Music and was composer-in-residence with the San Francisco Symphony, for whom he wrote both the *Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra* (1983) and *The Golden Dance* (1986). Commissioned in celebration of the orchestra's 75th anniversary and dedicated to its conductor Herbert Blomstedt, the latter work evokes both California's status as the "golden state" as well as the

so-called "golden mean" of Greek geometry, yet its musical inspiration lies elsewhere still, building on a twelve-tone row derived from the Gregorian chant melody "Pange lingua."

Wuorinen recognizes a relationship between his active promotion of new music and his interest in older compositional styles: "I have felt for many years that the recovery of pre-Classic music and the persistence into our own age of 18th- and 19th-century music...has invalidated conservative/progressive dichotomies and rendered notions of avant- and arrière-garde irrelevant. We have most of the past with us in the living form, for comfort, influence, rejection, embrace." Instead of adopting a facile vision of "progress," Wuorinen aspires to timelessness.

Wuorinen has received the most prestigious awards the music world has to offer, including a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship and two Guggenheim Fellowships. He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1967, and in 1974 he was honored by a request from Stravinsky's widow, Vera, to compose a work based on her husband's final sketchbook. Wuorinen lives in his native Manhattan where he continues to foster and promote a wide range of contemporary music. Among his later works are settings of poetry by John Ashbery and James Fenton (1998), and an impressive trilogy based on Dante's eschatological writings: *The Mission of Virgil* (1993), *The Great Procession* (1995), and *The River of Light* (1996).

### **Wuorinen, *Trombone Trio* (1985)**

*for tenor trombone, mallet instruments, and piano*

Written in the summer of 1985, Wuorinen's *Trombone Trio* acquired its unusual instrumental combination after extensive discussion between the composer and the dedicatee of the work, trombonist Ronald Borrer of the contemporary music ensemble Parnassus. Like many of Wuorinen's other scores, its structure owes something to the so-called "Golden Section" (the mathematical ratio approached by successive pairs of numbers in the series 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, etc.). Listeners are more likely to key into the Trio's relatively clear divisions between sections that differ in their momentum, figuration, and overall character, from the sustained opening to the jubilant frenzy of the coda.

Eschewing traditional trombone "tricks," although there are a few glis-

sandi to be heard here and there, Wuorinen's Trio pays special attention to matters of attack and decay. The Trio is replete with forte-piano accents that function in two distinctly different ways: giving color to the initial bars and a bell-like central section, and adding emphasis to the active material that fills much of the rest of the score. The sense of propulsion in the outer sections highlighted by moments of insistent repetition (sometimes in rhythmic unison, sometimes in off-kilter syncopation) that seem both to reinforce and to interrupt the ensemble's momentum. In the Trio's calmer moments, each instrument traverses its own unique spectrum between lyric and percussive effects, with the pianist going out of his way to imitate a percussionist, the xylophone and marimba exploring their gentler sides, and the trombone showing off its extraordinary musical flexibility.

### ***John Harbison* [b. 1938]**

"A few years ago," John Harbison recalls, "a German presenter asked me for my 'artistic Credo,' which seemed a characteristically European request, but in the spirit of international cooperation I furnished the following: 'to make each piece different from the others, to find clear, fresh large designs, to reinvent traditions.' Grand and general though it is, the statement seems a good place to begin...." These red threads—memorable content, clarity of form, and creative relationship to music of the past—knit together Harbison's oeuvre, along with the pronounced literary and lyrical impulses that we will hear tonight in *The Seven Ages*.

Harbison has often cited among his primary influences Bach, Stravinsky, and jazz—though not necessarily in that order. A pianist by training, he fronted his own jazz band at age eleven and one can still hear harmonic and rhythmic references to jazz transformed in works from every stage of his career: in the early Duo for flute and piano (1961), the Second Symphony (1987), and especially in the period flair of *The Great Gatsby*, commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera in 1995 and lately revived both at the Met and by the Chicago Lyric Opera. Harbison's youthful affection for Bach, particularly for the vast repertory of cantatas, has also shaped his mature activities both as composer and as conductor of such groups as the Boston Cantata Singers and Emmanuel Music. At Harvard (where he studied composition and poetry) and Princeton (where he worked with composers Roger Sessions and Earl Kim), he brought these early influences into dialogue with a wider range of contemporary

compositions, including the works not just of Stravinsky (whom he met at the Santa Fe Opera in 1963), but also of Schoenberg and Webern, Benjamin Britten, and the American composers of Sessions' generation.

Harbison is not alone in realizing the underlying similarities between jazz and baroque music: harmony-generating basslines, steady tempos overlaid with tremendous rhythmic subtlety, improvisational melody, the counterpoint of distinct voices. Like Harbison, Stravinsky, too, took pleasure in linking fugues and foxtrots. Some of the most interesting parallels between Harbison and Stravinsky, however, deal less with specific musical features and more with an underlying tension between emotional expression and compositional control. In describing his own *Variations* (1982; for violin, clarinet, and piano) he cites examples from Stravinsky's most austere works—the end of the *Symphony of Psalms* and the finale of *Symphonies for Winds*—observing that: "To my ears, the most ecstatic musical world is that of complete formalism, which is a sort of ritual thinking. If you have everything conforming to some sort of higher law, that is the true realm of the ecstatic, rather than just pure Dionysian fury."

This same dichotomy has influenced Harbison's choice of subject matter, which tends to place moments of sheer drama in carefully controlled contexts. In the composer's words: "I'm always attracted by subjects that have a sense of ritual about them. That's probably why I do a good deal of setting of Bible passages—they have a hieratical text." Indeed, Harbison has set a wide variety of sacred and semi-sacred texts. His dramatic motet *The Flight into Egypt* won a Pulitzer Prize in 1987 and since that time some of his most prestigious commissions have involved religious texts, including a Requiem commemorating all the victims of World War II (performed on the 50th anniversary of V-Day by the Stuttgart Bach Choir and the Israel Philharmonic) and a 2002 Requiem completed (after a long gestation period) in the aftermath of 9/11. For his *Four Psalms* (1999), commissioned by the Israeli Consulate of Chicago fifty years after the founding of Israel, Harbison traveled to the Holy Land, spoke with people from all walks of life, and incorporated their words into his score, which juxtaposes Biblical and contemporary reflections. Ever ecumenical, Harbison also composed a motet, *Abraham* (2004), which was performed at the Papal Concert of Reconciliation in the presence of Pope John Paul II.

As *Four Psalms* suggests, Harbison has a keen ear for the selection and

shaping of the text he sets. He wrote his own libretto for *Gatsby*, but he has also engaged with poets ranging from the German romantic Holderlin to the legendary sixteenth-century poet Mirabai, whose ecstatic verse inspired the composer's *Mirabai Songs* (1982) and whom he compares to Emily Dickinson as a creator of "texts which draw you into the poet as a character." In a program note for his 1991 song cycle *The Rewaking* (1991), on texts by William Carlos Williams, Harbison explains: "My choice of text for a vocal piece usually happens as follows: 1) the poems are inadvertently memorized, and won't go away, 2) they begin to run parallel to a musical shape I already have in mind, 3) they clarify and enlarge upon what began as a purely musical impulse." Harbison's "purely musical impulses" tend toward the dramatic, and they have resulted in music so engaging that he has sometimes been called upon to explain (or explain away) its popularity. His response is characteristically thoughtful. He writes, "[my works] share a commitment to spontaneity, naturalness, and memorability. Their surfaces may be more transparent than their substance. Their apparent simplicity is an invitation to wade in, but the hope is that some will also feel an undertow."

For forty years, Harbison has taught at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where in 1995 he was named an Institute Professor (the highest academic distinction offered to resident faculty). In addition, he has won the Heinz Award for the Arts and Humanities, the Harvard Arts Medal, awards from the American Composer's Orchestra, the American Music Center, and the Kennedy Center, as well as a MacArthur Fellowship. He has served as composer-in-residence all over the United States and has conducted such orchestras as the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, and the Handel and Haydn Society. He is currently president of the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, Acting Artistic Director of Emmanuel Music, and artistic director of the Token Creek Chamber Music Festival, held on the farm in Wisconsin where Harbison does much of his composing.

### **Harbison, *The Seven Ages* (2009)**

*for mezzo-soprano, flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano, and vibraphone*

Harbison composed *The Seven Ages* during June and July of 2008, at the Aspen and Tanglewood Music Festivals. Each of the six songs in the cycle sets a text by Louise Glück, whose poem "Relic" was also incorporated into the composer's Fifth Symphony. Describing his attraction to

her verse, Harbison observes that "every Glück poem...could be music, this in spite of the fact that her poems are often much larger than those composers tend to set. Her words are clear, strongly placed, deeply felt, vivid—all the things needed to suggest rhythm, melody, and a kind of 'symphonic' structure."

As Harbison observes, the poet's appeal is not just aesthetic but also, in a sense, psychological: "While visiting with the Tanglewood Composition Fellows in the summer of 2008...Louise Glück gave colorful, reluctant testimony about her writing habits. Her work leaves her periodically, reappearing inconveniently and unbidden. This account confirmed, for me, the affinity I feel for her cadence, voice, and material. *The Seven Ages*, taken hold in the midst of an active summer schedule, after a 'blank' period—which always feels irrevocable—felt like an urgent conversation with the poet. After living in these poems it was difficult to leave them."

*The Seven Ages* was commissioned by the Serge Koussevitsky Foundation in the Library of Congress, and is dedicated to the memory of Serge and Natalie Koussevitsky. The composer also wishes to express his gratitude "to Louise Glück for her poems, both in this piece and wherever they have appeared, and to the Wylie Agency for use of six of them in this piece."



Please join us for a reception in the lobby after the concert. Scores from tonight's program will be on display.

## The Performers

**Tod Brody** teaches flute and chamber music at the University of California, Davis, where he also performs with the Empyrean Ensemble. His varied musical life has included playing for symphony, opera and ballet companies, Broadway shows, and traditional chamber ensembles. Brody is the principal flutist for the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra, Sacramento Opera, and California Musical Theater; he also appears frequently in such ensembles as the San Francisco Opera and Ballet orchestras. With the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, Empyrean Ensemble, and Earplay, Brody has performed numerous world premieres, and has been extensively recorded. In addition to his work as a teacher and performer, Brody serves composers and new music as Executive Director of the San Francisco Bay Area Chapter of the American Composers Forum. He has been a member of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players since 2001.



**Pamela Dellal**, mezzo-soprano, has been praised for her “exquisite vocal color,” “musical sensitivity,” and “eloquent phrasing” in repertoires ranging from the medieval to the 20th-century and beyond. She is a regular guest with the contemporary music ensembles Dinosaur Annex and Boston Musica Viva, and she has also appeared with the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, the Lumen Ensemble and Collage, performing works by Martin Boykan, Martin Brody, Edward Cohen, Ruth Lomon, Shulamit Ran, Judith Shatin, Fabio Vacchi, Judith Weir, Scott Wheeler, and others. She has sung at the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, and Boston Early Music Festival, and she has performed under such conductors as William Christie, Christopher Hogwood, Roger Norrington, and Seiji Ozawa.

Dellal’s operatic engagements include roles in the works of Barber, Britten, Harbison, Mozart, and Purcell performed by The Red House Opera Group, Prism Opera Company, Opera Aperta, Ocean State Lyric Opera, the New Boston Theatre Project, and the Opera Company of Boston. As a member and Acting Director of Sequentiala’s women’s ensemble Vox Feminae, she has recorded the music of Hildegard von Bingen and has toured the U.S., Europe, and Australia. Dellal is a frequent soloist in the Bach Cantata series presented by Emmanuel Music for twenty-five years, having performed almost all 200 of Bach’s sacred cantatas. She gave the world premiere of Harbison’s *The Seven Ages* with the New York New Music Ensemble in Merkin Hall and she is slated to sing it with Boston Musica Viva later this year.

**Nanci Severance**, viola, was educated at Oberlin Conservatory, where she studied with Denes Koromzay, and Northern Illinois University, studying with the Vermeer Quartet and Bernard Zaslav. She has been a member of the San Francisco Symphony since 1982. She has performed with many Bay Area ensembles, including the Stanford Quartet, Composers Inc., Chamber Music West, the Midsummer Mozart Chamber Players, and the Parlante Chamber Orchestra, with whom she was principal violist. Her summer engagements have included the Scaneateles Festival, Eastern Music Festival and the Telluride Chamber Music Festival. Severance officially joined the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players in 2008, but she has performed with the ensemble since 1986.



**Conductor Sara Jobin** has won wide acclaim particularly in the realm of opera. She has conducted performances of *Tosca*, *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Norma*, and the world premiere of Philip Glass’s *Appomattox* for San Francisco Opera, and she led a production for that company of Rachel Portman’s *The Little Prince* last year. She has also led productions for the San Francisco Opera Center including Conrad Susa’s *Transformations*, *The Bear*, *Dr. Heidegger’s Fountain of Youth*, and *Egon und Emilie*. Recent credits elsewhere include another Glass world premiere, *The Bacchae*, with the New York Shakespeare Festival; *Carmen* with Anchorage Opera; a live recording of John Musto’s *Volpone* with Wolf Trap Opera; *Faust*, *Carmen*, *La Bohème*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and an upcoming *Figaro* with Tacoma Opera; performances of *Der fliegende Holländer* with Arizona Opera, and a fire opera version of *The Seven Deadly Sins* at the Crucible in Oakland. With Frederica von Stade, she issued the world premiere recording of Chris Brubeck’s *River of Song*, which was written for her and the Tassajara Symphony. Recent orchestral debuts have included Symphony Silicon Valley and the Dayton Philharmonic, and later this season she conducts the Bochum Symphoniker in Germany. She will lead the SFCMP in Nice this November.

–Program Notes by Beth E. Levy

## The Ensemble

**The San Francisco Contemporary Music Players** (SFCMP), now in its 39th year, is a leader among America's most distinguished and successful chamber music organizations, performing, commissioning, and recording the music of today's composers. The group presents works written for both large and small chamber ensembles. A ten-time winner of the prestigious national ASCAP/Chamber Music America Award for Adventurous Programming of Contemporary Music, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players has won this award more times than any other ensemble. It has commissioned 74 pieces and performed over 1,150 new works, including 72 U.S. and 141 world premieres.

Each season the ensemble performs a subscription series in the Bay Area. It has also toured widely throughout California, with performances on such concert series as San Francisco Performances, Cal Performances, the Stern Grove Festival, the Other Minds Festival, Los Angeles' Monday Evening Concerts, the Ojai Festival, and the Festival of New American Music in Sacramento. SFCMP made its European debut at the Cheltenham Festival of Music in 1986 and its East Coast debut at the Library of Congress in 2001. The ensemble has recorded eleven albums of its own and contributed to nine others. Its musical outreach programs include presentations in public high schools and its *Contemporary Insights* series of intimate performances with conversation.

## Staff

**Christopher Honett**, Executive Director, has served as Director of the Harvard Group for New Music, as North American representative for music publisher Editions Henry Lemoine, and as Executive Director of the Manhattan Sinfonietta, where among other projects, he produced the US premiere of Martin Matalon's 1995 score for the classic Fritz Lang silent film, *Metropolis*. A PhD recipient in music composition from Harvard University, Chris's musical mentors have included Julian Anderson, Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Chaya Czernowin, Mario Davidovsky, Joshua Fineberg, Magnus Lindberg, and Bernard Rands. His music has been performed by the Ensemble Intercontemporain, the Arditti String Quartet, the Boston Conservatory Wind Ensemble, and others. Mr. Honett is co-author of *The Listen*, a book geared toward anyone curious about new music regardless of his or her musical education.

**Carrie Blanding**, Director of Operations and Marketing, joined the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players in 2007, after six years as co-owner and Administrative Director of Next Big Thing Children's Theatre, a popular performing arts camp for children in the East Bay. She has also worked at the Mountain Play Association and trained through internships at the San Francisco Opera and San Francisco Performances. An accomplished singer, Ms. Blanding has performed with the San Francisco Symphony Chorus and was a soloist with the U. C. Jazz Ensembles. She obtained her B. A. degree in Comparative Literature from the University of California at Berkeley, where her work was honored with the department's academic achievement award.

**William Quillen**, Project Developer, is a Ph. D. candidate in musicology at the University of California, Berkeley, writing a dissertation on contemporary Russian music. He earned a master's degree in musicology at U. C. Berkeley and a bachelor's degree in history and music at Indiana University, Bloomington. During 2007-08, he was a Fulbright scholar at the Moscow Conservatory, where he spent the year working with contemporary Russian composers. He has been the assistant director of the University Chorus at U. C. Berkeley, an intern with the San Francisco Symphony, and has co-organized symposia and concerts in California and Moscow. He joined the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players in September 2008.